

A cozy cottage by the sea

by **SUE MAYFIELD GEIGER** on *AUGUST 24, 2019, Coast Monthly*



WHEN GISELE ORIENT SAW THE 1973 TWO-BEDROOM, TWO-BATH JAMAICA BEACH HOUSE, SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH IT AND SAW ITS POTENTIAL. PHOTO BY JENNIFER REYNOLDS

Beachy finds, sandy feet and a million-dollar view make for a perfect beach house

Most weekend mornings, Gisele Oriot rises early to go on her very own treasure hunt along the sandy shores of the Gulf of Mexico. Oriot is on the lookout for driftwood, twigs, washed up bamboo, seashells, metal objects and anything else that strikes her fancy.

Oriot isn't picky. Sometimes, the most useless items might become something that works well in her Jamaica Beach home — where many of those items have found a permanent spot.

Although just 988 square feet — not including the wrap-around front and back decks or the open area underneath the house — Oriot's 1973-built, two-bedroom, two-bath cottage is the perfect weekender for her and husband, Bertrand, to escape the hustle and bustle of Houston.

Born near Lyon, France, Oriot arrived in the United States 30 years ago and met her husband-to-be a short time later. Because both were in the food distribution business, they had a lot in common and tied the knot.



THE LARGE ISLAND IN GISELE ORIOT'S OPEN KITCHEN IS MADE FROM THREE PIECES OF CEDAR FOUND ON THE BEACH. PHOTO BY JENNIFER REYNOLDS

In 2014, Oriot started looking at beach houses. "The first time I saw this one, I fell absolutely in love with the place, even though it was dated and

needed a lot of work," she said. When she returned with her husband, he wasn't impressed. "I knew it had so much potential, so I convinced him of my vision, plus I had recently sold my company and needed a project, so we bought it," she said.

With a little help from her friends and some local trades, the work began. Wide plank flooring — painted white and distressed — replaced wall-to-wall carpet. They installed new Sheetrock and added new ceiling beams. A few of the original beams were left and the newer ones were painted white. The main center post, a gift from the sea, is one that Oriot found on one of her morning walks.



"When I find things along the beach, I say to myself, 'I can put that here, and put this there,' so that is why you see so many natural elements inside the house," she said.

A tall, rustic window shutter installed as a door between the living room and hall is one that Oriot got from Antique Warehouse in Galveston, where owner Scott Hanson was a big help when it came to repurposed items, Oriot said.

All the windows were replaced and four picture windows were added to enhance the view.

The original kitchen cabinets hanging over the former island were removed and new lower cabinets were installed and painted white. Quartz replaced aging Formica countertops. A new island, made from three pieces of cedar found on the beach, sits atop more found wood. New appliances and stove vent were installed and a separate, stand-alone, custom-built cabinet with glass doors shows off a collection of dinnerware.



A UNIQUE CHANDELIER, MADE OF BRANCHES AND TWIGS FOUND ON THE BEACH, HANGS IN THE OPEN LIVING ROOM. PHOTO BY JENNIFER REYNOLDS

A bell-shaped, clear glass pendant lamp hangs atop the dining room table, which is surrounded by bistro chairs. A lighted sculpture in the corner was made from a fallen tree trunk by artist Marie Lacroix.

The eye-catching living room chandelier stands out for its jumbled tree branches and twigs that cascade down from

a nautical light fixture. “Of course, we found all of those pieces on the beach,” Oriot said.

The living room is furnished with a mix of bamboo, wicker, jute and beachy finds. Various tables are scattered about, displaying driftwood and dried branches — many found among the grasses and sea oats growing within the confines of the dunes. A lamp covered entirely with oyster shells was also made by Lacroix.



GISELE ORIOT AND HER DOG, DIEGO, SIT IN HER ART SPACE AT HER JAMAICA BEACH HOME WHERE SHE DABBLES IN PAINTING. PHOTO BY JENNIFER REYNOLDS

Oriot's artist area, behind the sofa, is where she paints. A tall, striking mirror framed in a mass of seashells hangs above an antique trunk that originally belonged to a prominent Galveston family.

The hallway takes you to the guest bathroom with an iron-framed mirror from an abandoned boat, and built-in shelves made of beached wood and plaster.

To the right, a guest room with twin beds, a Capiz seashell waterfall chandelier and a vintage rattan chair are welcoming additions for visitors.

"I don't like things you get at the usual places," Oriot said. "I like resale shops and antiques — things that look worn."

The master bedroom is an extension of the owner's personality and her love of anything and everything having to do with the sea. Bedside tables made of driftwood came from Flea by the Sea in Galveston, and the dresser — left by previous owners — was sanded, made to look distressed and fits right in. A rustic harpoon is on view in a corner.

The tiny master bath, filled with repurposed wood, includes two hanging lamps strung across a piece of driftwood above the bathroom sink.

The wrap-around deck features thin strips of driftwood tied together horizontally to serve as Oriot's rendition of privacy curtains. Tall Adirondack chairs, a hammock and picnic table offer places to sit and enjoy the million-dollar view.

More inviting places to sit can be found underneath the house where dunes covered with sprawling vegetation are just mere steps away. Beyond that is the mighty Gulf of Mexico.

"This is a beach house," Oriot said. "I wanted a place where anyone could come in with sandy feet, be casual and enjoy all this as much as we do." Her husband now agrees.



A SCREEN MADE FROM BRANCHES GIVES A LITTLE PRIVACY TO A SEATING AREA UNDER THE HOUSE. PHOTO BY JENNIFER REYNOLDS